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**U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
POLLUTION REPORT**

I. HEADING

Date: August 15, 2000
Subject: Nicor Mercury Sites, Mt. Prospect and Lombard, Cook and DuPage Counties, Illinois
From: Brad Stimple, U.S. EPA On-Scene Coordinator, Region 5, RS3

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POLREP: #1 (Initial)

II. BACKGROUND

CERCLIS ID No: ILN000508064
Response Authority: CERCLA
Start Date: 07/24/00
Completion Date:

SITE ID # B5P9
NPL Status: NA
Action Memo Status: NA

III. SITE DESCRIPTION

A. Incident Category: Residential Mercury Spills - PRP Oversight

Site Location: Various Addresses in Mt. Prospect and Lombard, Cook and DuPage Counties, Illinois (known to date)
Mt. Prospect - LAT: 42° 03' 13" North; LONG: 87° 56' 27" West

1. Site Description:

On 7/24/00, U.S. EPA was informed by a resident of a home located at Mt Prospect, Illinois that a mercury spill had occurred in his home and several others in the immediate area. Upon further investigation, it was discovered that on or about 7/12/00, Nicor Gas (Nicor) and their subcontractor Henkels & McCoy, Inc. (HMI) were relocating outdated gas meters and associated regulators from residential basements to the outside of the homes. Many older gas meter regulators connected to high pressure gas mains were manufactured to include a mercury filled component which contained up to four ounces of metallic mercury. The HMI employee performing the meter replacement would, as common practice, leave the open container of mercury removed from the regulator on the basement floor upon completing the work. Eventually the container would spill on the basement floor and in many cases the mercury would unknowingly be tracked

throughout the homes by the occupants.

On 7/25/00, U.S. EPA, START contractor and ATSDR personnel responded to the scene of the residential spills and were informed that at least four other homes were potentially contaminated (

Nicor had retained a cleanup contractor (SET Environmental Services) and an industrial hygiene firm (Hygieneering, Inc.) who have been performing decontamination activities since 7/22/00. U.S. EPA determined that cleanup activities appeared adequate but that confirmation air sampling procedures and cleanup levels to be attained were inadequate. Nicor was informed of proper confirmation protocols to be initiated and were asked to generate and adopt a formal air sampling plan to be reviewed and approved by U.S. EPA and ATSDR.

ATSDR contacted the Illinois State Health Department (IDPH) to inform that agency of the spill incidents. Both ATSDR and IDPH have been consulting with many of the residents to ensure that proper medical testing and monitoring have been made available to the residents by Nicor. During the cleanup phase, residents have been relocated to nearby hotels until the homes have been properly decontaminated and deemed safe to return.

On 8/01/00, U.S. EPA and ATSDR were informed of other homes in the Lombard, Illinois area which may be contaminated due to improper mercury regulator replacement by Nicor and/or HMI. At the request of U.S. EPA, START personnel were directed to continue air monitoring support at both residential areas as necessary. Residents of the affected Lombard homes were also relocated. Approximately 13 homes in the Lombard area were identified as being potentially contaminated. The majority of the Lombard homes were contaminated by neighbors and friends unknowingly tracking out mercury from two primary homes (

) where mercury regulators had spilled in the basement due to improper removal. It was later determined that the meter replacement and subsequent mercury spills occurred in early June 2000.

To date, two Mt. Prospect homes and ten Lombard homes have been either screened or decontaminated and sampled to indicate that existing ambient air levels of mercury meet criteria established by ATSDR for re-occupancy. ATSDR uses the cleanup guideline value of 0.3 micrograms per cubic meter of air ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) and variables such as sample location, occupants ages, and whether pregnant woman reside in the home to evaluate if the home is safe for return. Confirmation air samples are collected using a pump and tube method and analyzed at a certified laboratory (see formal sampling plan for more details). The remaining homes are still undergoing decontamination and will require confirmation sampling and evaluation of the results.

The Mt. Prospect and Lombard incidents have been traced back to one HMI employee who was replacing gas meters in these areas. Nicor and HMI have generated a list of approximately 65 other homes throughout their Chicagoland service area where a mercury regulator has been identified either inside or outside of a home. These are homes where HMI employees may have performed meter replacement work. U.S. EPA, ATSDR and IDPH have requested that Nicor screen these homes as soon as possible to determine whether the regulators were removed improperly and to determine whether mercury contamination exists. Nicor has indicated that this work would commence on 8/16/00 and that U.S. EPA would be informed of the results.

2. Description of threat:

The presence of metallic mercury and associated vapor release discovered in many of the above mentioned homes poses a serious threat to human health and the environment through direct contact, ingestion, and inhalation. Mercury vapor screening results discovered by U.S. EPA/START and by the cleanup contractor indicate levels well above guideline levels established by ATSDR for residential settings.

IV. RESPONSE INFORMATION

A. Situation

Nicor has assumed responsibility for the mercury spills and has retained cleanup contractors to perform the removal work. U.S. EPA has assumed a monitoring and oversight role to ensure that the homes are properly decontaminated and that air monitoring activities are properly pursued.

3. Enforcement

On 7/31/00, U.S. EPA issued a CERCLA General Notice of Potential Liability and a Request for Information to both Nicor Gas and Henkels and McCoy, Inc. Both parties have responded and U.S. EPA enforcement staff is in the process of reviewing the responses. In a letter dated 8/10/00, U.S. EPA requested that Nicor screen the additional homes identified in the Information Request document as soon as possible. Nicor was verbally informed on 8/11/00 that if this work does not commence soon, U.S. EPA would have to pursue further available enforcement options.

U.S. EPA has also requested that Nicor identify any other subcontractors who may have improperly removed mercury regulators in the past and screen homes as necessary

B. Planned Removal Actions

U.S. EPA with the help of ATSDR and IDPH, will continue to monitor the cleanup, consult with residents and evaluate confirmation air sampling results as necessary.

C. Key Issues

No key issues to discuss at this time.

V. COSTS

TO BE DETERMINED.

* The above accounting of expenditures is an estimate based on amounts known by the OSC at the time of preparation of this report. The cost accounting data shown in this report does not necessarily represent the exact monetary figures which the U.S. Government may include in any claim for cost recovery.

VI. DISPOSITION OF WASTES

Any recovered mercury and all contaminated items generated as part of the residential home cleanup effort is being properly disposed by the cleanup contractor, SET Environmental of Wheeling, IL.